



CALLED BY CHRIST GIFTED BY THE SPIRIT

To Share Christ in and through the Church

STEWARDSHIP

Caring for the Household of Faith

*“What identifies a steward? Safeguarding material and human resources and using them responsibly are one answer; so is generous giving of time, talent, and treasure. But being a Christian steward involves more. As Christian stewards, we receive God’s gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, Tenth Anniversary Edition, 2002, page 42).*

PART ONE: THE CALL TO STEWARDSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Stewardship is a relatively new word in Catholic circles, yet it is an ancient image and provides a profound insight into what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. When we hear stewardship preached in our churches, notions of raising funds easily come to mind, but the Christian understanding of stewardship is indeed much richer and provoking.

In 1992, The Catholic Bishops of the United States wrote a Pastoral Letter entitled, *“Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response.”* In this letter, the Bishops wanted to familiarize members of the Church with an appreciation of stewardship as a responsible way of living the demands of the Gospel in our busy world. (The Bishops reissued their Pastoral Letter in 2002).

At that time, here in the Archdiocese of Detroit, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council and representatives of the people in the pew who met on a regular basis with Cardinal Adam Maida (then Archbishop of Detroit), encouraged him to develop a four-part Adult Faith Formation Series to help all of us better understand our calling to be responsible stewards of everything that God has entrusted to our care.

To assist discussions on Christian stewardship on the parish level, a summary of the main points of the Pastoral Letter are provided here, along with some leading questions. The goal of parish meetings on stewardship is to facilitate a hearty discussion. Much more important than addressing all the ideas presented here is encouraging a lively exchange among parishioners on this important issue of Christian growth. It is the hope of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council that the Bishops’ reflections on stewardship will spring into effectiveness in ongoing parish life.

Realizing the diversity of needs in our local Church, and in order to deepen the discussion among parishioners, there are some further resources offered in each of the four discussion guides: a biblical portrait of the Christian steward drawn from the Pastoral Letter itself, some models of stewardship for our daily home and parish living, reflections on the call to stewardship, and a final blessing prayer. Together, we hope to grow more deeply in our understanding and in our practice of responsible stewardship, inspired by the Gospel.

1. Stewardship is a Gospel lifestyle that is ever old and ever new.

The Bishops of the United States have initiated a discussion about stewardship that connects this important concern to the life and ministry of Jesus. In teaching what it means to be a disciple, Jesus draws examples from ordinary daily living to illustrate the profound and enduring message. In the twelfth chapter of Luke's Gospel, Jesus commends the "faithful and prudent steward" who is found to be vigilant to the needs of others, all the while alert to welcoming the master who promises to return. Jesus gives the charge to all those who recognize the challenge of stewardship: "*Much will be required of the person entrusted with much and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more*" (Luke 12:48).

2. Trustworthy stewards are necessary partners in daily living.

In our daily experience, we come face-to-face with stewards. Some actually bear the title of "steward." In the context of the workplace, those who faithfully represent the concerns of fellow workers are union stewards. We sometimes draw upon the expertise of the wine steward in a restaurant. There are many other service-oriented persons we meet in the course of life's journey who embody the responsibilities of stewardship. Stewards are distinguished for their attentiveness in serving the needs of others. The biblical understanding of the steward is very similar, referring to one who is perceptive and responsive to real and pressing needs. A steward is not an owner, but rather a caring servant who extends loving concern in the name of another.

3. Christians are called to be stewards of their personal vocations.

It is very appropriate that our Bishops call us to embrace stewardship as a mature expression of all the good things that Jesus calls us to be: "*Christians are called to be good stewards of the personal vocations they receive*" (page 13). There was a time in the Church when the notion of vocation was limited to the inner call experienced by priests and religious. In the developments resulting from the Second Vatican Council, we understand that each of us has been called by Christ in a most personal way. God does have a purpose for each of us, and God wishes to have the message of the Gospel come to maturity within our unique gifts and personalities. The common element in our personal vocations is "*to follow Christ and to live Christ's life as our own*" (page 14). Our vocations are always realized in a community of faith; we need the faith response of others to help us discern what God might be asking of us, and what contribution God desires from us to better the world and enrich the Church.

4. Stewards are called to give "an immediate response" to their vocation.

We are called to recognize the call of God within us and all around us in the lives of others. God's call has an urgency to it, and like the earliest disciples Jesus encourages an immediate response to His invitations "*Come, follow me*" and "*Come and see.*" Though Christ will always wait for our response, there is no time like the present to be convinced that our talents and gifts are critically needed in the ongoing mission of Jesus to renew the face of the earth.

5. The call to stewardship demands a lifelong response of gratitude.

Though urgent in its expression, the response of stewardship casts a ray of light on our ordinary lives. Following Jesus is indeed the work of a lifetime. Stewardship is a total way of life, not just an activity to be done along with others. Knowing that God has so richly blessed us deep within, we desire to show our gratefulness through generous sharing. This kind of generosity, inspired by God, has the power to be contagious and to encourage others to make a conscious gift of their own personal gifts. Stewards are not concerned as much with success as being faithful to the intense personal relationship with the Lord experienced in our personal vocation. Stewards do not look to judge self or others, but instead let the Word of God call them to more authentic and generous service.

6. The call to stewardship teaches us the cost of discipleship.

Though it is a great calling, the life and ministry of a steward is neither easy nor comfortable. Stewardship is the road less traveled. It is, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, cited by the Bishops, in *The Cost of Discipleship*, not a life of cheap grace but “costly grace.” *“It is costly because it calls us to follow, and grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ”* (page 15). The call to stewardship is to keep our eyes fixed on the prize, Jesus Christ, Who did not count the costs of life, but instead found countless ways to lay down His life for us that we might rise to imitate His loving service in daily and heroic ways.

SOME LEADING QUESTIONS

1. Many messages about stewardship begin with mundane, yet important, financial concerns about income and expenses. Were you surprised that the Bishops took the “highroad” about stewardship, understanding the call of the steward to be at the heart of our spiritual journey?
2. Are you convinced that God wishes you to be a “steward of your personal vocation”? How important is the contribution that you have to make to the betterment of the world and the growth of the Church?
3. How can these notions of stewardship be communicated to more persons in our parish, inviting them to understand the parish as the center for sharing our unique, different, and personal callings from the Lord?
4. What has been your experience of the “cost of discipleship and stewardship”? What experiences of service have been painful? Have you ever needed to take a respite or sabbatical from your stewardship? How does one become renewed in one’s commitment to generous service after negative experiences?

PAINTING A BIBLICAL PORTRAIT OF THE STEWARD

“Faithful and prudent” (Luke 12:42). The New Testament does not provide a complete portrait of the Christian steward all in one place, but throughout the Gospel, Jesus paints the picture of the disciple who is a faithful and prudent servant, one who is conscientious in the appreciation and sharing of God’s gifts. *“Evidently, good stewards understand that they are to share with others what they have received, that this must be done in a timely way, and that God will hold them accountable, ...”* (page 39). Stewards primarily understand themselves as servants, those who tend with loving care to the concerns of the Lord Who entrusted them with a responsibility. Jesus calls forth both the ingenuity and the loyalty of the disciple to use one’s gifts and talents well, in concert with God’s design for human living.

“Being a Christian steward means more.” Christian stewards view the world and their relationship to it in a unique way. As Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, *“The world is charged with the grandeur of God”* (page 39). Christian stewards sense God’s continuous love and actions in the ordinary events of daily life, and constantly aim to discern the best ways to respond in the spirit of Jesus. Stewards sense the presence of God, and constantly seek ways to witness the nearness and the reality of God’s provident love.

DEVELOPING MODELS FOR HOUSEHOLD AND PARISH STEWARDSHIP

In your household: Reflect on the times that you have been called upon to give “immediate response” as a steward to a pressing need in your neighborhood or community. Neighbors may have rallied around a family suffering a loss, or may have taken the initiative to address an evident social problem. Call to mind occasions when you have been on the receiving end of another’s generous stewardship.

In your parish: Ponder on the reputation of your parish, and the times when the parish communion has been particularly responsive to the needs of others. List the persons, groups, and events in your parish where the call to Christian stewardship is already evident in generous hearts.

REFLECTIONS ON STEWARDSHIP

Fundamentally, to be a steward means to acknowledge the fact that God created us. He created the world. We are here for a time and we are called back to His kingdom. And so, the world is given to us to use, to enjoy and to live in. And none of us has a corner on this world. That is, we have private property, enjoy the houses we live in, the cars we drive, the environment, but all this is God's gift and somehow or another we have to understand that this world belongs to everyone. Once you have a gift, the challenge is to share it. A person that has things and just keeps things for themselves is in isolation. We know that is contrary to the way the Lord made us. He made us brothers and sisters. Jesus came to redeem all of us. He came to save us, and He told us how to use the world, how to use the things of this world, and so that when we see a brother or sister in need, we have to respond.

FINAL BLESSING PRAYER

Lord,
may everything we do
begin with Your inspiration
and continue with Your help,
so that all our prayers and works may begin in You
and by You be happily ended.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Book of Blessings, § 552.



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